

The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, January 26 1655

Quest. 1. **W**HAT were the Gods the Babylonians chiefly adored, and what was their manner of worshipping them; had every one access to their Altars in general, or had they Priests which offer'd for them?

Ans. They had their Priests, as well as other Nations, they were call'd Chaldeans, and Magi, and much inclined to Astrology and divination, and had their Schools for the educating youths in that kind of knowledge. The chief Deity's they worshipped were Belus or Baal, and Astarte, or Ashtaroth, by whom they meant Jupiter and Juno. By their religious discipline they were also obliged to worship the Sun, and the King himself to offer to him every day a white horse richly furnished. They likewise under the names of Naga, and Shaca, worshipped the fire and the Earth. To their Goddess Shara, they kept a feast in Babylon for five days, during which time the Servants were Masters, and Masters Servants. They also adored Venus, and for the maintaining of her worship, the women prostituted themselves to strangers, procuring much riches thereby; to this end they sat and exposed themselves at her Temple, which they call'd *Militia*. Their Priests used to shave their heads and beards, and stand in their Temples, with Axes, Scepters, and other weapons in their hands; with Candles lighted before them; and used to have their processions, carrying their Idols on their shoulders, the people before and behind worshipping. They held a divine providence, but denyed the creation. They worshipped diverse ways, sometimes by bowing the head, or bending the knee, sometimes by bowing or prostrating the whole body, and sometimes by kissing the Image of their Gods, or their own hands, if they could not reach the Image.

Quest. 2. A Gentleman asked me whether I could teach his Son the Latin Tongue in a year's time; I answered, that I could; to which he replied, he knew my deserts to be great, but that he could not afford to reward me according to them, yet would give me according to his ability which was ten pounds, meat, drink, washing, and Lodging; I had a respect for the Gentleman, and I being out of business Embraced it. But before I had been a month in his house I had a proffer of forty pound per Annum, to be a book-keeper; I told my friend I was Engaged, and could not in honour recall my word, and if an hundred a year should offer, would not. The Gentleman's Son whom I taught, did by God's blessing and my Endeavour prove such a proficient in the Latin Tongue in three months time that he could express himself as readily, as if it had been his mother's tongue; to the admiration of several Gentlemen in London, of all nations who have discoursed him. He could read Virgil, Horace, Ovid, &c. I mean understand them, altho he be yet but seven years and six months old; I have been with him, in all about four months and odd days, being dismissed the twelfth of this instant November, from midsummer last, when I entered with him. It being the Summer time, and the child of no studious inclination; because of his years, I carried him abroad in the fields with no small expense, and played his learning into him, in so much that I can boldly affirm that it cost me more in expenses then now his father is willing to pay me for all, besides he not living in his own House Conveyance for my being, Lodges me cross the city in a ordinary House, where I was obliged to be at the expense of a cup of beer morning and night, which he really promised to pay, and now denies it; therefore this with my former expense falls all upon me. And further, the Gentleman's Lady being an high-spirited woman, taking me to be a menial servant would constrain

me to stay at home continually, and never go abroad at any time, I suppose, without leave; altho I never used to go till after 4 or 5 in the afternoon; and she so influenced her son my pupil that he told me I was his servant and ought not to go abroad but attend him; and the lad being inhibited with his mother's indulgence, mattered not what he said; suffering all this with a great many more incivilities which are too tedious to relate, I told the Gentleman that I was weary and desired him to provide himself for I could not endure such abuses, being conscious of my own integrity in the discharge of my duty; And he expelled me at a minute's warning. Qu. Whether I deserved such usage, and if three pound five shillings is a sufficient reward for my care, or if I can be justly tax'd with Negligence in respect to my Pupil?

Ans. If the relation is true, and you have really perform'd what you pretend, we think you too far from meriting such base treatment, that if you had tribled your first agreement, besides all your expenses born, a generous person would believe it little enough for what you have done. And if you could but give sufficient publick testimonies, of your being capable of teaching Latin, in so short a time, which would not be very difficult, since you say there have been so many Gentlemen who have discoursed this Child, we don't doubt but you might find persons enough who would gladly give you encouragement, and know how to reward you better.

Quest. 3. I find this question with your answer in the 15 vol. Num. 29. Qu. 4. Going through Holborn last week 'twas my chance to see the prisoners go to Execution, some of whom I perceived not at all concern'd, &c. But what if this were carry'd higher yet, Gentlemen, as I'll give you an instance? In the year 1682. I was at Paris, and saw three Malefactors, (who had three Priests on their right hands) going in a cart, to the fatal place of Execution; they pass'd one before another, that is to say, two in Rank and three in file, their backs toward the Horse, as our condemn'd Prisoners, go up Holborn-Hill. The Priests left Arms were about the Malefactors Necks, all the way earnestly exhorting 'em; and if any one of 'em did but offer to look or stare about, (as some of 'em did) his Confession would pull this Malefactor's face close to his own and reprove him for it. Qu. Is not this, a most high piece of Charity, Gentlemen, and very well worthy the imitation of the Clergy of our Metropolis?

Ans. We doubt not but there are a great many pious men amongst the Clergy that would gladly make use of any probable means for the salvation of these poor wretches as well as that of others, and therefore shall offer this to the consideration of such, whose other charges do not employ their whole time; it not being unlikely but that if such as were wholly disinterested should show some particular concern for the future happiness of these miserable wretches, it might make 'em reflect more closely upon their own condition, and better dispose 'em for good Counsel, and convince them of the necessity of repentance.

Quest. 4. What is the Nature of a true Epic Poem? who have best observ'd it amongst the Poets, and what are the Rules for it?

Ans. Homer and Virgil have, by the consent of all ages, been the most perfect models of Epic Poetry; from them it is that we must take our artificial measures; and there is no great doubt to be made but Aristotle form'd his method for the composition of a regular Poem, upon the practice of Homer. An Epic Poem is properly a fable, in imitation of an important action, and related in verse after a wonderful, but probable manner.

The fable is therefore the chief foundation. And is a discourse intended to form our manners, by instructions disguised under the Allegory of an action. Consequently to construct the fable as it ought to be, a good choice must be made of the instruction and moral which is the ground of it. Artificially thus to counterfeit and under the Idea of truth, 'tis requisite to take from History the Names of such persons to whom the thing probably happen'd, and relate it under those known Names, with such circumstances as change nothing that is essential to the Fable and Moral. Homer, for instance, seeing Greece divided into as many States as Towns, whose Form of Government was independant one upon another; designing on one side, to show them how necessary a good intelligence, and agreement amongst themselves was, to defend them against the common Enemies; and on the other hand, that the disunion and ambition of their Governours would inevitably ruine their Confederations; it was requisite for him to find such persons as cou'd probably represent those he intended in this fable, and therefore chose Achilles contending with Agamemnon. Those who are ignorant of the art of the Poet, don't discover the fiction, but believe he had no other end than to relate the adventures of the Siege of Troy: But he insinuates Excellent instructions when he seems only to speak of his Hero's. He makes use of the Greeks suffering the disagreement of their Governours, as Aesop in his fables does of the wolfs devouring the sheep whilst the dogs who ought to have kept them, mutually destroyed each other. Thus a particular recital of the actions of the person whose name is borrowed has a less share in an Epic Poem, than the fiction of what probably ought to be done. Aristotle himself recommended inventing above all things, and the forming the design of the fable, before names were affix'd to it. And then if the persons whom the Poet introduces have perform'd such known actions as relate to his design, he may make use of, and accommodate them to it: For we are most easily perswaded that a thing is possible, when it has before happen'd. This Law of Probability is so essential that it must not be dispensed with, even to speak great things; As we see in the Hecuba of Seneca who makes too handsom reflections upon the destruction of Troy, and the Death of Priam; for it cannot be supposed that a woman Loaded with so many afflictions, shou'd have such thoughts as were more worthy a Philosopher, than agreeable to the sad condition whereunto her misfortunes had reduced her. 'Tis true, this defect is something excusable in Seneca, because he maintain'd it with a great deal of wit: But 'tis insupportable in those who, intending to raise their discourse, forsake good sense: Who for fear of falling to the Earth, lose themselves in the Clouds. One of the principal rules in this Poem, is unity of action, which is rigorously observed in the Aeneids and Iliads. And therefore 'tis requisite so to connect all the Episodes in the principal action, that they may necessarily depend one upon another: They must be members of the body to which they are united, and as so many incidents which yet hinder not the unity of action; consequently the action which the Poet takes for his subject must be all of a piece: It must have such a beginning as supposes nothing before it for the understanding of the fact, and which requires something shou'd follow; A middle, which leaves no interpretation, is the cause of what preceeds, and the effect of what comes after; And an end, that permits us to expect nothing more. To this must be added the accomplishment of the Epic action, which is the putting a period to what ever disturbs the rest and tranquillity of the Hero. If we consult Authority we shall find no instance of a work of this nature that ending leaves the chief person unfortunate. In respect to its duration Aristotle has fix'd no time. Homer has given eight years to his Odyssees; Virgil seven to his Aeneids, and the Iliads are perfectly concluded in forty seven days.

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